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Travels and adventures in Egypt, Arabia and Persia

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Chapter XII. Aden

CHAPTER XII.

ADEN.

The Gibraltar of the Indian Ocean—We Meet the Remains of Dr. Livingstone—Interviews with Jacob, his "Nassick Boy"—A most Faithful Servant—His Account of Livingstone's Death—His long Journey to the Coast—Aden, the Picture of Desolation—Amphibious Arabs—Street Gamins—The Parsee Merchant—Steamer Landing—Excursion to the Town—A Dilapidated Equipage—John Chinaman—Trains of Camels—An Abyssinian Exquisite and his Bride—Description of the Reservoirs—The Bazaars—The Climate of Aden a Suggestion of the Hereafter—We part with the Prince of Zanzibar—A "Peg in the Coffin" of English Officers.



As we steam into the landlocked harbor of Aden, over which tower high volcanic mountains, their rocky sides unrelieved so far as the eye can reach, by a single green tree or a blade of grass, we notice the flags at half mast, and a steamer just arrived from Zanzibar, in naval mourning, viz: a light blue streak along her sides, and a broad band of the same color around her funnel. She has on board

the remains of one of the most famous travelers and explorers of modern times, the lamented Dr. Livingstone, on their way home to be placed at rest in Westminster Abbey,

beside the dust of England's greatest warriors, statesmen, and scholars.

Lieut. Murphey, of the Royal Artillery, who was one of the party that had penetrated for his relief, as far as Unyanyembe, and there met the Doctor's faithful servants with his dead body, has come thus far, and now returns to Zanzibar.

As soon as our anchor was down I went on board the "Calcutta," where I had a very interesting interview with his faithful and devoted servant, Jacob, a "Nassick boy" who has been under the tuition of the English missionaries at Zanzibar, and can speak and write English. He is very black, with short curly hair, intelligent and very communicative. He goes on with the body to England. He has kept a diary of all the events connected with the Doctor's death, and of his adventures on his way to the coast, which have been published.

Dr. Livingstone died in May, and Jacob says that they were afraid if they did not bring away his body they might be accused of killing him. They had a small quantity of spirits and some salt, and Jacob used these in preparing the body for its last long journey. They packed it in the bark of a tree, and for over seven months toiled through a wilderness of jungle, and past many hostile tribes to Unyanyembe. From here they were two months more on their way to Zanzibar.

In passing through the territory of some powerful chief, he told me they were stopped, and a large sum of money demanded as a ransom. This they did not have, and for a time he was in despair. At last he got away by stratagem. Pretending to bury the body with great ceremony, they secretly took it out from its case of bark, and repacked it like a bale of goods.

The toils and hardships they passed through would fill

a volume. Two large cases, containing the Doctor's papers and charts, accompany the body to England. Jacob entirely confirms Stanley's account of meeting Dr. Livingstone, and sets at rest all controversy on that point. His account of the Doctor's death was most touching, and the tears which came to his eyes, showed how devotedly he was attached to his master. His own efforts and labors were told in a modest, unassuming manner, and I was much prepossessed in his favor. He will doubtless be made much of when he reaches England. The mail steamer left the next day for Suez, with the remains of one of England's bravest sons, faithfully guarded by his devoted servant.

Aden, the great half-way coaling station between the Mediterranean and India, is situated on a peninsula that juts out from the Arabian coast, and in appearance, is the most desolate, barren, and forbidding place, that it is possible to conceive of. Naked cliffs and volcanic ridges surround it on every side—some rising to the height of eighteen hundred feet—while forts mounting heavy guns, crown every peak, and water batteries command every part of the harbor and its entrance. Six years ago, during the Abyssinian war, Aden was the base of supplies for the English troops operating against King Theodore. Then the harbor was full of ships-of-war and transports. Annesley bay, where the British disembarked to march against Abyssinia, is about three hundred miles up the coast, full of small, rocky islands, and very difficult and dangerous of access. At Aden, there are daily arrivals and departures of steamers, plying through the Suez canal between Europe and India and China. It is ninety-six miles from here to the entrance of the Red Sea, and this lonely, barren rock, this treeless, grassless, black ruin, which can most expressively be described as "Hell with the fires put out," where not a

drop of fresh water can be had, except that which is caught from the clouds or condensed from the sea, is growing into a busy town, with a population of thirty thousand people. A score of small native craft are in the inner harbor, and anchored around us are five or six large steamers, and as many sailing ships.

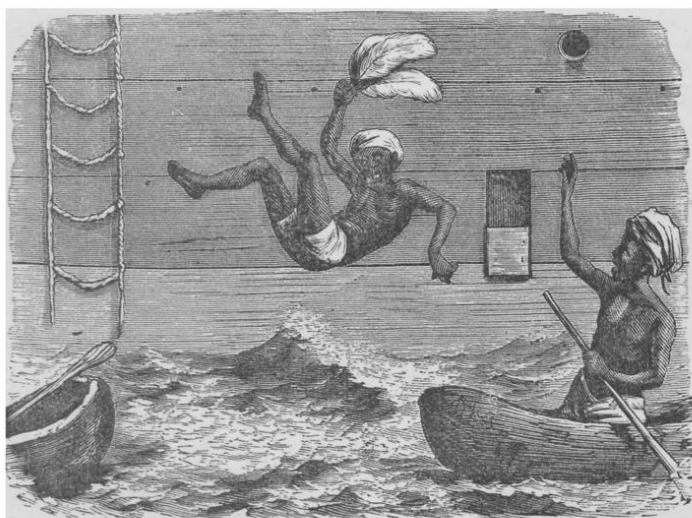
Besides its importance as a coaling station, Aden has secured to itself the export trade in Mocha coffee, amounting to twenty thousand tons a year.

Notwithstanding its desolate and oven-like appearance, this place is said to be quite healthy from October to April. If the "fires are put out" during the winter months, the terrific, scorching heat of summer, must give the inhabitants a foretaste of the lower regions with the fires at full blast.

Aden is very strongly fortified, and cannon bristle from every point commanding the harbor. It has been held by the English about thirty-five years, and its importance has increased immensely since the new route to the East was opened across the isthmus. Half way between Europe and India, every steamer here replenishes its supply of fuel, and from its position, it commands the Red Sea trade, as Gibraltar does the Mediterranean. The warlike tribes on the neighboring coast, have several times attacked the place, but for the past ten years, their chiefs have rested quiet, with the annual stipend allowed them by the British Government. The garrison consists of one European and two native regiments of Sepoys from India.

Our steamer is soon surrounded by a fleet of tiny boats, or "dugouts," each containing a shining little Arab, in most primitive toilet, who clamors for the privilege of diving for any coin we may throw into the water. They seem more than half amphibious, and as they slip in and out their canoes, diving and sporting in the clear sea, their

smooth, glossy black skins, remind us of a school of porpoises. We throw them a bright sixpence, and a dozen at once go for it. We see them kicking and struggling deep under water, then the victor rises to the surface with a grin, shows the coveted coin between his teeth, and shakes his woolly head like a spaniel. Other boats contain the dealers in ostrich feathers, red coral and curious shells. These are mostly sharp fellows, and if they do not sell their own wares, are sure to steal whatever they can lay their hands on. They are not allowed to come on board, but sometimes will smuggle themselves up the ladder, and if discovered, the sailors take great delight in playing upon them with the hose, or unceremoniously pitching them, feathers and all, into the sea.



OSTRICH FEATHER DEALERS AT ADEN.

We spend the days on shore but find it more comfortable to sleep at night on the ship. At the landing we

are surrounded by a crowd of *gamins*, real street Arabs, who follow us everywhere, clamoring for *baksheesh*,—offering to procure for us a carriage, or donkey, or to get up a fight for our amusement. Words being of no avail, we have to use our sticks freely, to keep them off, but nothing daunted, they follow us at a little distance, watching their opportunity. We sit down for a moment, to rest in the shade, and one comes up stealthily behind and commences fanning me with a *punkah*. This delicate attention meets its reward, and the *baksheesh* is won. There is said to be over five hundred of these little fellows in Aden, from ten to fifteen years old, who come from the neighboring tribe of *Abdalees*, on the mainland. They have a community of their own, and live upon a small rocky island in the harbor, or in caves on the mountain side.

Along the *bund* facing the water, are immense piles of coal, several large stores and warehouses, and two hotels. The most important personage here, is a Parsee merchant, Cowasjee Dinshaw. He is the agent of several lines of steamers, and the broad veranda in front of his place, is a general rendezvous for strangers. His warehouse is crammed with a most varied and heterogeneous stock of merchandise. It is a "variety store" and "curiosity shop" combined. Japan, China, India, France, Germany, and England, all are represented on his shelves, and there, too, can be found Cleveland petroleum and Connecticut clocks. He will fill your order for anything you may desire, from an elephant to a paper of pins, only you must expect to pay handsomely for whatever you buy of "Old Cowasjee."

This is called the "Harbor Landing;" the town and cantonments of the troops are situated in a hollow among the volcanic hills five miles away.

From the many dilapidated vehicles at the landing, we

selected the most promising one, but it had evidently served out its full term in some European city before being transported to another continent. The horse was wild and half broken, the harness supplemented with pieces of rope, and the native driver seemed in keeping with the establishment. I must, however, do him the justice to say that whatever he may have lacked in wearing apparel, he was not wanting in activity and energy. He rode sometimes on the shafts and sometimes on a seat perched in front of the vehicle—and was continually jumping off to run alongside,



DOWN GRADE.

and urge the horse to greater speed. He always rode up the hills, but when we came to a steep descent, he would jump off and help hold back the carriage. We noticed that the vicious beast at such times, laid back his ears, as if not satisfied with the hold-back arrangements, and seemed inclined to throw his heels in the air, which would not be pleasant to a driver directly in the rear.

The road was hard and smooth, and for two miles wound along the shore, then turning inland with many sharp curves, through ravines and round the base of high cliffs, on which not a particle of vegetable life could be seen. The scenery was unique and grand, but the very picture of desolation. We were in high spirits, like a couple of sailors taking a run ashore, after a long sea voyage. We met long trains of camels, some laden with bags of "Mocha," others carrying goat skins of water, from a small stream fifteen miles away on the main land.

These ungainly beasts, with crane-like necks and awkward gait, plodding along in single file, each one surmounted with a black urchin, perched high in the air, were in strong contrast with the little donkeys, scarcely bigger than a Newfoundland dog, and carrying burdens larger than themselves, or mounted by natives whose feet dangled to the ground. The people here, are of every race known in the East, and we met one unmistakable "Johnny" with pig-tail and slanting almond eyes, who told me in "pigeon English" that he was cook on a steamer in the harbor. But most of the natives we met, were Abyssinians, very black, with Asiatic, not negro, features, and hair cultivated in long corkscrew curls, sticking out in all directions, and by the application of lime, faded out from black to a dingy brown. These shock heads, in which both sexes seem to take great pride, were not unlike the prevailing style of young girls' hair at home. The appearance of the women was by no means attractive. All wore enormous silver ear ornaments and nose rings, strings of glass beads, and anklets and armlets, more massive than ornamental. One couple especially attracted our attention. They were gotten up in the most exquisite style of Abyssinian art, especially the young woman, and seemed to create quite a sensation on the road. She was profusely

decorated, and wore in her nose a large ring with the three pearls, indicating that she was a bride. Her "fellar's" wool, originally black, had been colored to a dingy blonde, and was elaborately curled until it would fill a half bushel measure. The lady rode a donkey, and the groom walked by her side (barefooted, of course), and so absorbed were they in each other, that we drove slowly by and stared at them, without attracting their notice.

The entrance to the town is through a deep gorge, where for a space of one hundred yards the walls rise from eighty to one hundred feet in height, on each side. A massive gateway and cannon, guard the entrance, and a squad of native soldiers in red coats (Sikhs from India), presented arms as we passed. Emerging from the narrow ravine, the town was before us, occupying a basin about a mile in diameter, evidently the crater of an extinct volcano. A circle of jagged peaks surround it, some of them covered with forts and batteries. Several regiments of troops are quartered here in airy stone cantonments, forming a large fort in the center of the town.

The most curious feature in Aden is the tanks or reservoirs, for supplying the town with water. The fall of rain is very slight, sometimes not a drop for three or four years. There are no springs, and the nearest fresh water on the mainland, is fifteen miles off. These magnificent cisterns, date back to the sixth century, and as originally constructed, had a capacity of over thirty million gallons. They are excavated in part out of the solid rock, and lined with a hard white cement, having the appearance of marble. When the British took possession of Aden, they were in ruins and filled with rubbish. Within the last fifteen years, a large sum has been expended on their restoration, and they are now capable, when filled, of supplying the town for over a year. It is very difficult to give a descrip-

tion of these great works, intelligible to one who has never seen them. The range of hills forming the walls of the crater, is nearly circular, the inner side of these hills is very steep, but the descent is broken by a large plateau, about midway between the summit, and the sea level. This table land is intersected by numerous ravines, nearly all of which converge into one valley, which thus receives the drainage of a large area. The steepness of the hills, the hardness of the rocks, and the lack of soil upon them, prevent any great amount of absorption, and a moderate fall of rain sends a tremendous torrent of water down the valley; and here the reservoirs are built. They are very fantastic in their shape, which is made to conform with the natural walls of rock on either side. Some are built like dykes, across the gorge of the valley, and every feature of the adjacent rocks is taken advantage of. The overflow from each is conducted into the succeeding one, and a complete chain is thus formed, reaching to the very heart of the town. The edges of these great basins are protected by iron railings, and stone steps lead from one level to the next. Everything about them is kept scrupulously clean, and the glare of the mid-day sun upon these white walls was exceedingly painful to the eyes. When I was here three years ago, they were nearly full, but now they contain very little water, which is not surprising, as it has not rained during all that time. The British government, which never does anything in the way of public works by halves, not satisfied with expending an immense amount of money on these great cisterns, has also constructed large condensing works, by which the sea water is rendered fit for use, and is now building an aqueduct to convey the water from the main land to the town.

From the tanks, we drove through the bazaars, which are very filthy and mean, with more gew-gaws of European

manufacture than native goods. The specialties of Aden are ostrich and marabout feathers, ostrich eggs, leopard and lion skins ; which we found very cheap.

We have spent some days at Aden, and said good-bye to the Prince with many expressions of regret. At parting he repeated his offer of hospitality at Zanzibar, with six or any number of meals a day, not to be eaten with the fingers after the native style, but with knives and forks and other civilized appliances.

But Zanzibar even with these attractions must be declined, for it is close under the equator and the climate is too hot for a summer campaign.

While here we called by invitation on the English officers of the " Artillery Mess," whose bronzed faces showed long service in the East. Here, as in India, the visitor is always welcomed with a " peg," which means brandy and soda, and a *peg* it has proved in the coffin of many a poor fellow who has measured his length in a foreign soil, before the expiration of his seven years service, which would entitle him to a furlough home.